

What's different about it?

BUSH'S PROPOSAL FOR THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

*The presidential campaign this year is unusual in that both Al Gore and George W. Bush are placing so much emphasis on improving education. Proposals from both candidates could significantly change the federal government's role in education. This is one in a series of issue briefs intended to help people understand how each candidate's major proposals **differ** from what the federal government already does in the field of education. To analyze these proposals, the Center on Education Policy drew from information on each candidate's Web site and from news reports as of August 15, 2000. These briefs are not meant to judge the merit of these proposals.*

How does Bush's proposal for the use of technology in schools differ from current federal actions?

George W. Bush would terminate nine major current federal initiatives that help elementary and secondary schools to acquire and use technology. The most significant of these is the Schools and Libraries program, known as the "E-Rate" program, funded at \$2.25 billion by the Federal Communications Commission through fees paid by telecommunications companies. This program assists public and private schools and libraries with discounted telecommunications services, Internet access, and internal connections. Bush would also eliminate eight technology education initiatives authorized by Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Bush proposes to replace these nine programs with a new "Enhancing Education Through Technology Fund" to be funded at \$3 billion, approximately the same level appropriated in FY 2000 for the nine current programs. Under Bush's Technology Fund, schools would be able to use federal funds for teacher training, software and hardware acquisition, and system integration. All of these activities can be supported under the current federal efforts, but the Bush proposal would allow school districts more discretion to decide which purposes to support with federal dollars. Bush's ideas differ from what is being done now in these ways:

1. Eliminate guaranteed funding provided through the E-Rate program for schools and libraries.

The FCC's E-Rate program, which has guaranteed funding from fees paid by telecommunications companies, would be eliminated. The program Bush proposes in its place would allow schools to fund telecommunications services and connections and to acquire computer software and hardware, but he does not propose a guaranteed base of funding for his new program. Rather, the president and the Congress would annually determine funding levels.

2. Give high-poverty rural school systems a funding priority.

Bush's proposal would give a funding priority to high-poverty, rural school districts. The existing Technology Education program under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act gives a general funding priority to high-poverty school districts, both urban and rural. High-poverty school districts also receive a larger discount on telecommunications services under the E-Rate program than do other school systems. It appears that high-poverty

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urban school districts would not receive a funding priority under Bush's new program.

3. Hold schools accountable for improving student achievement through technology.

As part of their overall accountability systems, states participating in Bush's new program would be required to establish measures for determining how the technology initiative improves student achievement. The current programs do not contain this requirement.

4. Give schools information on how to use technology to improve student achievement.

Bush would allocate \$65 million for research to determine which methods of using technology improve student achievement the most. An additional \$15 million is proposed to establish an Education and Technology Clearinghouse to disseminate research findings.

What are some questions that can be asked about Bush's proposal?

- Since the uses of funds are similar under current programs and Bush's proposed program, the major difference would be that no funding would be guaranteed by fees paid by telecommunications companies. *Should schools be uncertain from year to year about how much funding would be available for improving the use of technology, as proposed in Bush's plan?*
- If used correctly, technology helps students to develop problem-solving skills, to communicate in a variety of formats, and to learn collaboratively—skills which most state testing programs do not measure. *How will schools be able to show that technology improved academic performance when the skills learned through the best use of technology are not tested?*
- Why would high-poverty urban schools no longer receive a preference under Bush's plan? *Since those schools frequently have less access to the Internet than more affluent schools do, is Bush penalizing the poor in non-rural areas?*
- The federal government provides approximately 7% of the costs of elementary and secondary education, but under President Clinton, 25% of the funding for the use of technology in schools has come from the federal government. *Will Bush continue the federal financial commitment that improves technology in the schools?*
- Why are libraries and private schools, which now participate in the E-Rate program, not eligible under Bush's proposed program?

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact John F. (Jack) Jennings, director, Center on Education Policy

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